

# The depiction of war in journey's end and exposure



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In both Journey's End and "Exposure," war is generally presented in a gloomy light as Owen and R. C. Sherriff, respectively, focus on the attitude of the soldiers throughout their experience on the frontline. Whilst Owen draws more attention to the strain created by the harsh winter conditions in the trenches, Sherriff concentrates on the inside events of the trenches and how the soldiers are subject to emotional stress as a consequence of the war. Nevertheless, both texts constantly refer to the slow pace of World War 1 and suggest that the soldiers spent the majority of their time simply waiting for the enemy's next move. Furthermore, Owen and Sherriff imply that the soldiers almost lived in a false reality - as they avoid much mention of the enemy or any serious events in the war, and tend to have rather mundane conversations. Similarly, both writers hint at the psychological strain on the soldiers as a result of their continuous exposure not only to the weather conditions, but to the variety of horrors they face on the battlefield.

The idea of war as a tenuous state is reinforced throughout Owen's "Exposure" as at the end of stanzas 1, 3, 4 and 7 the phrase 'but nothing happens' is repeated. The fact that the phrase opens with 'but' indicates that despite how prepared the soldiers may be, they still have to wait painfully until the opposition decide to make an attack. This implies that the men grow more distressed as time progresses because the waiting simply allows them to overthink the situation more - increasing their panic. The repetition of the statement and the ab ba rhyme scheme produces a cyclical effect, therefore allowing the reader to reflect on the tediousness of war and the monotonous routine of the soldiers. Likewise in Journey's End Sherriff often uses stage directions of 'there is silence' to convey the eerie

atmosphere which is produced as a result of the lack of action. When talking about the German attack Osbourne states that 'it's been expected for the last month' which again shows the slow development of the war, as the soldiers have no choice but to entertain themselves whilst they anticipate the next raid. In fact, one of the potential names for Journey's End was 'Waiting', so it's evident that Sherriff viewed the war as a sort of inane waiting game causing great irritation, but mainly distress to the soldiers on the frontline.

Denial is another common theme in "Exposure" and Journey's End as the authors suggest that the soldiers block out the nightmarish nature of war by almost refusing to accept that it's real. For example, in "Exposure" Owen's use of rhetorical questions creates a sense of disbelief and confusion as they question 'what are we doing here?' and 'is it that we are dying?' This shows how the soldiers have become so overwhelmed by the whole process of war, that they have practically forgotten their actual purpose; therefore triggering feelings of denial. The soldiers question their existence in a dazed tone, as if they are half-conscious which again demonstrates their loss of engagement in the war. In the fifth stanza, Owen's alliteration in the words 'dazed', 'deep', 'ditches', 'drowse', 'dozed' and 'dying' produces a heavy, trance-like tone – creating an image of a limp, exhausted soldier plodding along. This adds to the idea of sub consciousness and produces a dream-like mood which verifies the soldiers' retraction from the war. Owen also compares the sound of artillery gunfire to 'a dull rumour of some other war' – similarly this indicates how the soldiers block out the war to the extent that they pretend they're almost not even involved at all; as if they're spectators. The phrase '

some other war' reduces the overall significance of the concept of war – it's evident that it's become an everyday aspect of life for the men on the frontline as they refer to it in such a vague manner (like it doesn't really concern them in the slightest). In Journey's End Sherriff maintains this idea of hyperreality, as the soldiers discuss such trivial issues such as 'getting dirt in your tea' and ask each other about whether they prefer 'black pigs or white pigs'. The discussion of these minor, unimportant subjects shows how the soldiers are desperate to avoid any talk of war, however in Sheriff's interpretation it appears as if the men are purely doing this on purpose 'to forget' the harsh reality of battle. Unlike Exposure, where the soldiers appear to be more bewildered and dazed, Journey's End highlights the soldiers' inner turmoil which they attempt to disguise by focusing on unnecessary things.

Moreover, both Owen and Sherriff express the mental and physical strain on the soldiers from the constant pressure of war. For example the opening stanza in "Exposure" states, 'wearied we keep awake'. The alliteration of 'w' produces a dull tone, as if the speaker is mumbling which suggests that they have been weakened by the continuous cycle of battle. The fact that the men force themselves to stay awake even though they are wearied shows how they push their bodies to the limit and refuse to give in, despite the great hardship of the war. In Journey's End Sherriff makes it clear that Captain Stanhope has suffered under the strain of war as he turns to alcohol to calm his nerves. Osbourne reveals that Stanhope was once 'on his back all day with trench fever – then on duty all night' which demonstrates his determination to fulfil his duty even when he is hit by serious illness.

Furthermore the repetition of the word 'all' in this sentence reinforces the

idea of the soldiers being stuck in a constant cycle of battle which obviously contributes to the deterioration of their physical and mental health.

Osbourne also says that Stanhope has 'stuck it till his nerves have got battered to bits' which further indicates how the war has such an immense impact on the men - as their nerves are destroyed by the horrors they have to endure.

Overall, it is evident that "Exposure" and Journey's End capture war in a similar light, as both perspectives consider the importance of time on the frontline in addition to the soldiers' feelings of denial in the trenches.

Moreover each text shows how the men are worn down by stress, as the war appears to drain all their energy and hope. Although Exposure concentrates more on the idea of nature acting against the soldiers, both outlooks allow the reader to consider the internal effects on the men rather than solely the physical impacts that are normally associated with war.